

# Former computer employees cite work conditions as problem

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Peter Beckman, a talented man known in his industry for being a wizard in the development of Linux clusters, came to Los Alamos National Laboratory to work in its prestigious Advanced Computing Laboratory four years ago.

"It was an outstanding opportunity," he said of doing research on LANL's world-renown supercomputers. "It was a fantastic job and a great place to work. I loved it. I use to wake up every morning and think I had the best job in the world."

In April, Beckman, now the director of a start-up in Santa Fe, TurboLabs, a division of TurboLinux, a company based in the San Francisco Bay Area, left the lab. (TurboLabs in Santa Fe now serves as the cluster research and development arm of TurboLinux.) He and five others, four from his LANL group and another person from Sandia National Laboratories, started their own company because they felt the work environment at the laboratory had changed.

They are not the only ones, said Beckman. He said he believes six other ACL scientists left around the same time he did. This might not seem significant alone, about a dozen or so employees leaving the laboratory from the approximately 187 who have left since October 1999, but there is more here than first meets the eye.

According to laboratory spokesperson, Kay Roybal, for example, the laboratory's attrition rate has been similar to last year's numbers.

"We are not seeing anything usually high or skewed," Roybal said, adding that she was not aware of numbers



of employees leaving within the Computing Division (CIC) being equal either. At the same time, approximately 40 people have been brought aboard as "strategic hires," throughout LANL, despite a current lab-wide moratorium on hiring.

The laboratory confirmed that 31 people had left CIC since January; although they were not able to give a detailed breakdown of which groups had lost people.

However, Beckman and other sources paint a different picture on the outlook of the lab's computing groups. There are only about 15 to 20 individuals with Ph.D.s in computing science at the lab, he said, and many of those who have left the ACL, for example, were top-notch, something that he said should be a wake-up call to management.

In an exiting memo to the laboratory, Beckman and his colleagues stated what they saw as the problems and gave suggestions for how to improve the environment again. They made it clear that for the time being, working for the government no longer made it sense for them and they are making much better salaries now in private industry.

"When I got there, it was an extremely exciting, vibrant place to work, very well-respected as a computer science research organization in the community," he explained.

It was a place where people like Beckman, who received his Ph.D. in computer science from Indiana University, could continue to expand their work as scientists, working among the best of the best from their

(Please see WORK, Page A-7)

